

**Rocky Mountain National Park
Action Plan &
Response to the Findings of the
Serious Accident Investigation Team
Jeff Christensen Fatality
January 2006**

This report presents recommendations for follow-up actions which are based on the Serious Accident Investigation Team (SAIT) Report dated November 21, 2005. These recommendations are specific to actions that have been or will be undertaken by Rocky Mountain National Park. Recommendations that have implications beyond the park will be reviewed and forwarded to the Director by a Board of Review.

These recommendations are offered with the understanding that they are recommendations to be considered and implemented by the affected Park, District and Sub-District supervisory personnel with valuable input by the field staff. These recommendations were developed after examining a single narrowly focused incident and should be considered in the manner in which they were derived. These recommendations will certainly improve safety, but are not meant as a broad fix for all circumstances and should be reviewed and tailored to the needs of the affected operation.

While the park in general has a good foundation for backcountry patrol operations, park management believes that by reviewing and in some cases formalizing its policies and procedures, the park can enhance the overall effectiveness of the program in terms of employee and visitor safety.

Recommendations and Actions

1. Re-emphasize and formalize with all employees the requirement of leaving behind written information regarding their backcountry travel plans. Utilize the park communications center (ROMO dispatch) as the clearing house for employee tracking and status checks and file this written plan with dispatch. The level of detail (route description) required should be included in the formalization of the process, however more information will typically translate to more protections for employees who fail to show up at the end of scheduled backcountry work.

Action Taken:

On August 19, 2005, an electronic message was sent by the Chief Ranger to all employees within the Division of Resource Protection & Visitor Management regarding the necessity of leaving information with the park communications center regarding backcountry travel plans. The communications center developed a tracking form that facilitates this process. This message was also communicated verbally

through the supervisory chain and again during a division team meeting. This same message was subsequently passed along to all park employees.

Action Planned:

An existing document entitled, "RMNP Backcountry Patrol Guidelines" will be updated, with new emphasis on these procedures. This document will be included in the RMNP "Ranger Operations Procedures" handbook for distribution to employees. Further, this information will be referenced and re-emphasized during existing employee training. Similar procedures will be implemented by all divisions.

Due date of Action Planned:

March 31, 2006 (Deputy Superintendent for Operations & Administration/Chief Ranger)
Ongoing

2. Any deviation from the intended route of travel, for any reason, requires employee notification of dispatch as well as the employee requesting of status checks when entering and negotiating difficult and/or hazardous terrain. This should include location description, description of the situation and the request for a ten or fifteen minute status check.

Action Taken:

On August 19, 2005, an electronic message was sent by the Chief Ranger to all employees within the Division of Resource Protection & Visitor Management regarding the notification of the park communications center whenever deviations are made to an intended route of travel. Instructions were also given regarding additional notification and requests for status checks when encountering a significant and/or unplanned hazard. This message was also communicated verbally through the supervisory chain and again during a division team meeting. This same message was subsequently passed along to all park employees.

Action Planned:

An existing document entitled, "RMNP Backcountry Patrol Guidelines" will be updated, with new emphasis on these procedures. This document will be included in the RMNP "Ranger Operations Procedures" handbook for distribution to employees. Further, this information will continue to be referenced and re-emphasized during existing employee training. Similar procedures will be implemented by all divisions.

Due date of Action Planned:

March 31, 2006 (Deputy Superintendent for Operations & Administration/Chief Ranger)
Ongoing

3. Re-emphasize the requirement for all protection employees to advise dispatch when they begin and end their daily tour of duty, and for dispatch to closely follow rangers whose scheduled shifts have ended but have not called out of service.

Action Taken:

On August 19, 2005, an electronic message was sent by the Chief Ranger to all employees within the Division of Resource Protection & Visitor Management to re-emphasize the existing requirement to notify the park communications center at the beginning and end of a daily tour of duty. This message was also communicated verbally through the supervisory chain and again during a division team meeting. This same message was subsequently passed along to all park employees.

Action Planned:

An existing document entitled, "RMNP Backcountry Patrol Guidelines" will be updated, with new emphasis on this existing procedure. This document will be included in the RMNP "Ranger Operations Procedures" handbook for distribution to employees and the information will be referenced and re-emphasized during employee training. We will continue with past practice of addressing this procedure during district training and through the employee performance process.

Due date of Action Planned:

March 31, 2006 (Chief Ranger)
Ongoing

4. Re-emphasize that communications are a life-link. The carrying of a spare radio battery is essential. Employees who plan or anticipate going into an area that has known radio dead zones should request from their supervisor a satellite phone for that particular patrol. Ensure that areas with poor or no radio coverage are mapped and known by all employees, so precautions can be taken when entering or operating in these areas. The Park should evaluate the use of existing (Personal Locator Beacons, etc) and emerging technology for use in areas where other reliable communications is not available.

Action Taken:

On August 19, 2005, an electronic message was sent by the Chief Ranger to all employees within the Division of Resource Protection & Visitor Management to re-

emphasize the importance of communications and the need to carry a spare radio battery. It also reminded employees that available satellite phones should be taken on patrols that include areas of inadequate radio communications. This message was also communicated verbally through the supervisory chain and again during a division team meeting. This same message was subsequently passed along to all park employees.

Action Planned:

An existing document entitled, "RMNP Backcountry Patrol Guidelines" will be updated, with new emphasis on these procedures. This document will be included in the RMNP "Ranger Operations Procedures" handbook for distribution to employees. Further, this information will be referenced and re-emphasized during existing employee training.

A map will be produced that captures available information on known radio coverage throughout the park. This map will be distributed to all park work units and the information included in employee training and orientation. After the coverage map is produced, system improvements will be evaluated to increase radio system coverage throughout the park.

An evaluation of technologies will be initiated to assess the practical application of use in a remote alpine park, compatibility with existing communications infrastructure and systems, and cost.

We will continue with the past practice of addressing communications procedures and equipment during annual backcountry orientation training, SAR training, district training, and through the performance appraisal process. Similar procedures will be implemented by all divisions.

Due date of Action Planned:

March 31, 2006. Update on Backcountry Patrol Guidelines and the production of a map on park radio coverage. (Deputy Superintendent for Operations & Administration/Chief Ranger)

Summer 2006. Assessment of system improvement to increased radio system coverage. (Deputy Superintendent for Operations & Administration)

FY-06. We will acquire additional satellite phones for availability to staff. (Deputy Superintendent for Operations & Administration)

5. Update and incorporate backcountry patrol procedures into RMNP Ranger Operations Handbook. This could include ensuring that supervisors convey clear expectations for the conduct of backcountry patrols. Backcountry patrols are conducted for a variety of reasons; at any time, anywhere, employees may be expected to deviate

from their intended route, or task, and respond to an unanticipated event or emergency. This might require taking care of oneself and/or visitors overnight, above tree line, during inclement weather. What individuals carry in their pack should reflect the ability to do this safely and to be self-sufficient for a reasonable period of time.

Action Taken:

On August 19, 2005, an electronic message was sent by the Chief Ranger to all employees within the Division of Resource Protection & Visitor Management to re-emphasize the objectives of backcountry patrol. This information focused on the employee's ability to provide for personal safety and the expectation that they might be called upon to care for another. This message was also communicated verbally through the supervisory chain and again during a division team meeting. This same message was subsequently passed along to all park employees.

Action Planned:

An existing document entitled, "RMNP Backcountry Patrol Guidelines" will be updated, with new emphasis on these procedures. This document will be included in the RMNP "Ranger Operations Procedures" handbook for distribution to employees. Further, this information will be referenced and re-emphasized during existing employee training. We will continue with past practice of addressing equipment and personal preparedness during annual backcountry orientation training, SAR training, district training, and through the performance appraisal process. Similar procedures will be implemented by all divisions.

Due date of Action Planned:

March 31, 2006 (Deputy Superintendent for Operations & Administration/Chief Ranger)
Ongoing

6. Update the list of minimum equipment required to be carried on single, multiple and other backcountry (ski, horse, snowshoe) patrols and formalize this through employee backcountry orientation and training. Ensure that a variety of personal protective equipment is either issued or made available for such patrols (signal mirror, map and compass, space blanket, whistle, clothing, first aid kit, headlamp with spare batteries, helmet, ice axe, crampons, bivy bag, radio and spare battery, etc.). Protocols that describe conditions when certain personal protective equipment is required to be used (i.e. helmet) should be developed, taught and periodically audited.

Action Taken:

On August 19, 2005, an electronic message was sent by the Chief Ranger to all employees within the Division of Resource Protection & Visitor Management that

addressed personal safety and equipment that is issued and/or available to employees. This message was also communicated verbally through the supervisory chain and again during a division team meeting. This same message was subsequently passed along to all park employees.

Action Planned:

An existing document entitled, "RMNP Backcountry Patrol Guidelines" will be updated, with new emphasis on equipment that is made available to employees and the requirements and expectations of equipment use. This document will be included in the RMNP "Ranger Operations Procedures" handbook for distribution to employees. Further, this information will be referenced and re-emphasized during existing employee training. If any additional equipment needs are identified beyond that which is currently provided or available, steps will be taken toward procurement. We will continue with the past practice of addressing equipment and personal preparedness during annual backcountry orientation training, SAR training, district training, and through the performance appraisal process. Similar procedures will be implemented by all divisions.

Due date of Action Planned:

March 31, 2006 (Deputy Superintendent for Operations & Administration/Chief Ranger)
Ongoing

7. Ensure that supervisors convey expectations regarding equipment and uniform serviceability and that procedures are implemented to ensure compliance.

Action Planned:

Expectations and procedures for compliance will be incorporated into the revised "RMNP Backcountry Patrol Guidelines." We will continue with past practice of addressing backcountry work expectations during annual backcountry orientation training, district training, and through the performance appraisal process. Similar procedures will be implemented by all divisions.

Due Date of Action Planned:

March 31, 2006 (Deputy Superintendent for Operations & Administration/Chief Ranger)
Ongoing

8. Emphasize that all employees should constantly maintain situational awareness and practice good, personal risk management. Emphasize the importance of evaluating where you are, how you feel, where you're going, changing weather, skills and

comfort level, time of day, pace, terrain, new country or old all those objective and subjective factors that, when taken together, help to influence good decision making. Employees must know and comply with the requirement to immediately report any and all injuries.

Action Taken:

On August 19, 2005, an electronic message was sent by the Chief Ranger to all employees within the Division of Resource Protection & Visitor Management that addressed situational awareness and risk management. This message was also communicated verbally through the supervisory chain and again during a division team meeting. This same message was subsequently passed along to all park employees.

Action Planned:

An existing document entitled, "RMNP Backcountry Patrol Guidelines" will be updated with information and emphasis on situational awareness and risk management, similar to that which now appears in the RMNP SAR Plan. This document will be included in the RMNP "Ranger Operations Procedures" handbook for distribution to employees. Further, this information will be referenced and re-emphasized during existing employee training.

The Park will continue with past practice of teaching and emphasizing situational awareness and risk management during annual backcountry orientation training, SAR training, and district training. We will continue to place emphasis on the safety aspects of our program and we will continue to strive to take advantage of subject-matter experts who can offer our employees information and tools upon which good decision making and risk management are derived.

The Park will continue to emphasize with employees that situational awareness, risk management, and good decision making is, ultimately, a personal responsibility. Through supervision, the employee performance process, and mentoring we will strive to continue monitoring and evaluating performance in these areas. We do this with the understanding that supervisors cannot always be present to monitor how these skills are applied. Similar procedures will be implemented by all divisions.

Due Date of Action Planned:

March 31, 2006 (Deputy Superintendent for Operations & Administration/Chief Ranger)
Ongoing

9. Establish standard and detailed training materials for backcountry training to ensure that all are consistently being trained in the same procedures, regardless of who is conducting the training.

Action Planned:

Standards and training materials will be developed for inclusion in the revised version of the "RMNP Backcountry Patrol Guidelines."

Due Date of Action Planned:

March 31, 2006 (Chief Ranger)

10. If specific footwear is necessary on certain types of terrain such as scree or talus to improve traction and safety, the Park should conduct a job hazard assessment (JHA) of the job activities being performed and provide specific footwear as personal protective equipment when needed.

Action Planned:

Step 1: JHA's will be developed to determine necessary footwear required for employees to safely engage in assigned tasks that are routinely conducted in terrain and environmental conditions encountered on the job. Step 2: Request funding and procurement of personal protective equipment as identified by the JHA.

Due Date of Action Planned:

Step 1: April 1, 2006 (Chief Ranger)

Step 2: To be determined (Deputy Superintendent for Operations and Administration) See Recommendation # 2.

-End of Park Action Plan-

